

*Copper, Class, and Crisis:
Changing Relations of Production
in Bougainville*

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In the outpouring of popular and scholarly writing about developments in Bougainville since 1988, many specific assertions have been advanced and disputed, often to the neglect of broader issues. It is not surprising that, in the heat of tragic events, few writers have troubled to put the Bougainville situation in a larger theoretical context. However, as Braudel (1980, 3–4) has warned, limits to understanding are imposed by attending solely to “that history which still simmers with the passions of the contemporaries who felt it, described it, lived it.” For example, the debate between Griffin (1990) and Filer (1990; 1992) about the distinctiveness of Bougainville relative to the rest of Papua New Guinea is constrained by failure to establish some general theoretical constructs specifying what is to be compared.

For Griffin (1990, 12–13), the key element in the current crisis is ethnonationalism. This phenomenon is rooted in Bougainvilleans’ perceived ethnic distinctiveness and fueled by local historic, geographic, and economic factors. The resulting “ineradicable widespread secessionist sentiment” makes Bougainville “a special case” in Papua New Guinea. Filer, on the other hand, argues that such local factors may have influenced the way the crisis has unfolded, but they cannot explain its origins. In his view, the origins of the rebellion are to be found in “a process of *local social disintegration* which is *not uniquely Bougainvillean*, but should rather be regarded as *the typical response of small-scale Melanesian communities to large-scale mining enterprise*” (Filer 1992, 1, emphasis in original).

Our concern here is not so much with the substance of the Griffin-Filer debate, for both authors offer useful insights. Rather, we are concerned

about the limitations inherent in the analytical frameworks they employ. Griffin, for example, is more concerned to describe the historical evolution of "ethnonationalism" in Bougainville than to explain its general nature and process of emergence. Filer is very concerned with process, but it is unclear how a particular scenario of "local social disintegration" precipitated by mining relates to wider processes of social change in Papua New Guinea or elsewhere.

In earlier publications (Wesley-Smith 1989; Ogan and Wesley-Smith 1992), we have found the concept of mode of production and, more particularly, that of relations of production, useful in laying out a suitable comparative framework. Using this framework brings some order to the bewildering variety of changes accompanying capitalist penetration of the area, and makes them easier to comprehend.

In this article we build on this framework to create a broader picture of change in Papua New Guinea, against which the particular history of change in Bougainville can be compared.¹

CHANGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The concept of mode of production as a particular set of social relations and productive forces was developed by Marx to help explain the rise of capitalism in Europe.² However, his assumption that an expansive capitalism would triumph over other modes of production everywhere has proved problematic.³ In order to explain why capitalism has not (or not yet) swept all before it in the so-called third world, theorists such as Laclau (1971) and Rey (1973) have argued that the symbiotic mix of intrusive and indigenous relations of production creates and perpetuates conditions of underdevelopment (see eg, Brewer 1980). We do not intend to pursue these ideas rigorously here. Our approach is based on the assumption that postcontact social change in Papua New Guinea is best understood through close attention to the historical interaction between precapitalist and capitalist relations of production. The first task, then, is to identify some important relations of production in precontact Papua New Guinea.

Precontact Papua New Guinea

Despite the sociocultural diversity often emphasized by anthropologists, most societies in Papua New Guinea at the time of contact were settled

gardening communities. In these communities were several keys to organizing people in relation to each other, and to material forces in the productive process. First, an extraordinarily well-defined gender-based division of labor existed. The household was the basic productive unit, so the association of husband and wife (or at least adult male and adult female) in subsistence activities was both normative and statistically normal. Not only did gender govern access to tools, but the gender-based division of productive tasks often gave rise to elaborate ideological and political superstructures.

Second, these societies were organized according to a descent principle, sometimes patrilineal, as in the highlands, sometimes matrilineal, or less often nonunilineal. Although an overemphasis on the descent principle is common in the ethnographic literature, we know of no Papua New Guinea society in which descent was irrelevant to the recruitment of social labor or the establishment of rights to productive resources, especially land. Third, locality or residence was important. Rights to productive resources could not always be maintained if those who possessed them on the basis of descent (or other attributes described later) were long absent from the area in which the resources were located. Conversely, long-term residence by individuals without other social ties might result in incorporation into a resource-holding unit.

Fourth, ego-oriented kinship networks were also significant. These were biological connections, or social ties based on an indigenous biological model, linking an individual to any other. Given the social definitions of kinship that might have been operative, it was often possible to find one's place in the production process by professing a kinship tie not easily understood by an outside observer. Finally, "gift" exchanges, whether of food, valuables, or people, played a central role in establishing or reinforcing key relationships. Various forms of marriage are included in this category, since these generally were framed in terms of the exchange of people or of other items (eg, shell valuables), the transfer of which was regarded as necessary to the establishment of an affinal tie.

One type of relationship is conspicuously absent. That is *social class*, in the technical meaning of a special, continuing relation of one group to the forces of production, such that the group systematically denies access to those forces to another, equally well-defined group. Among the reasons one can argue that Papua New Guinea societies lacked social classes at the time of contact is that access to land, the basic force of production, was

guaranteed by the operation of some combination of descent, ego-oriented kinship, residence, or exchange (cf, Strathern 1982, 138).⁴

Change before World War II

The early capitalist penetration of this part of Melanesia was slight. Even where significant metropolitan resources were deployed, as in New Guinea under German rule, the precolonial foundations for economic exploitation were lacking (Hess 1983, 52). Furthermore, neither merchant, planter, miner, nor colonial administrator had incentive to transform radically the existing relations of production. All benefited from the continuation of subsistence production in the village, which kept the price of local produce, trade copra, and indentured labor low, and minimized the possibility of widespread political unrest. Nevertheless, significant changes in relations of production occurred in the limited areas penetrated by the colonial administration before World War II.

One group of changes is associated with metal tools, introduced in the Louisiade Archipelago as early as 1849 (Griffin, Nelson, and Firth 1979, 4). Their entry into Papua New Guinea communities was both shaped by indigenous gender roles, and changed those roles—specifically by increasing men's domination within the community. Male monopoly of these more efficient tools gave men more time to spend on nonsubsistence activities, while women's burdens did not decrease. On the contrary, if men chose to apply the greater efficiency of steel axes to increase gardens and pig herds, demands on women's labor could become more onerous.

Another change involved land tenure. By the 1870s, land was being alienated in the New Guinea islands, a marked change in relations of production among people whose notion of land rights did not include permanent alienation by means other than the annihilation of the former landowners in warfare.⁵

Alienated land generally was used for plantations. The fact that copra was the primary crop had particular significance in changing relations of production between the world wars. In a copra plantation, almost no modern technology is required, nor does any incentive exist to make technological improvements to increase production or to improve the skills of the labor force. From the point of view of the laborers who did the dull, routine tasks required, their lives were disrupted but not transformed. From the point of view of the planters, they could act like masters of little

fiefdoms, behaving toward their subjects in as paternalist or racist a manner as suited their personalities. From the point of view of women living in villages from which plantation labor had been recruited, they might be deprived, not only of male companionship, but also of male help in maintaining subsistence production.

Although mining in Papua, and later in what had become the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, might seem to be quite different from copra plantations, the effects on Papua New Guinean social life were similar. In both kinds of enterprise, an indenture system removed men from their homes while women and those men left behind kept producing necessary subsistence. Special efforts were made to ensure that workers were returned to their villages after their contracts expired. However, in neither mining nor plantation work did laborers acquire new skills that could truly transform village life toward patterns, especially of consumption, they saw Europeans enjoying.

Therefore, on the eve of World War II, for the relatively small number of Papua New Guineans affected by colonialism, relations of production had been disrupted but hardly transformed. Steel tools had increased male dominance where greater complementarity of gender-based productive roles had prevailed. Men had been absorbed into the colonial economy to a degree, while women had continued their traditional work, albeit sometimes at a more oppressive level. Men in the colonial economy worked at unskilled tasks, in situations in which Europeans' racist attitudes were likely to be more visible than their efforts at economic efficiency.

Postwar Change

World War II had a notably uneven impact on the peoples of Papua New Guinea. Griffin, Nelson, and Firth (1979, 91) claim about one-third of the population was hardly affected, while areas like East New Britain, the Sepik, and Bougainville endured considerable suffering. In observing military operations, villagers in the coastal and island regions were likely to be exposed to European material wealth to a degree undreamed of earlier. Attitudes of Papua New Guineans toward colonization and their future changed, as did Australian policy, now directed more explicitly toward "development," and backed, for the first time, by significant resources.

A major event early in the postwar period was the extension of full administrative authority to the densely populated highlands region, and the pace of change experienced by these villagers was much greater than

that felt earlier by coastal and island people. The Highlands Labour Scheme recruited over a hundred thousand men during its twenty-four-year lifetime. Development of coffee plantations, especially after 1952, was even more transforming.

In contrast to making copra, harvesting and processing coffee must be done according to a definite timetable. Many tasks, especially harvesting, can be performed by women and children, who were early incorporated as casual labor on expatriate plantations. A further contrast with the earlier generation of copra planters was the postwar philosophy of "partnership" between Europeans and locals. What this meant in practice was encouraging selected Highlanders to plant their own coffee. Thus, the highlands coffee industry first produced something approximating social classes in rural Papua New Guinea.

Efforts to promote indigenous production of cash crops increased greatly throughout the entire territory in the 1960s. One of the most significant consequences of such efforts was the administration's focus on individual "progressive" farmers, accompanied by the attempt (spelled out in Ogan and Wesley-Smith 1992) to "reform" traditional patterns of landholding deemed inimical to rapid economic growth. Nevertheless, while rural commodity production undoubtedly served to strengthen individual rights in land, the wider context of customary tenure and group control remained largely intact.

While Papua New Guineans were encouraged to develop rural commodity production, they found fewer opportunities in the urban economy. Unskilled workers found urban wages often insufficient to support a family. Skilled and semiskilled workers, who had benefited from the postwar expansion of education and training, did manage to become established in the towns, often in the burgeoning state bureaucracy. Yet, as late as 1971, census figures suggest that nearly 60 percent of Papua New Guineans remained completely outside the cash economy.

In short, in 1964, when mineral exploration began on Bougainville, the overall political economy of Papua New Guinea could hardly be considered "modern." Traditional relations of production had certainly been disrupted, but the goals of "development" had yet to be realized. Women in particular found themselves shouldering an increasing share of the burdens of new economic activity while enjoying few of the benefits. Government-sponsored agricultural schemes encouraged the emergence of a new

commodity-producing rural elite, though most cash-crop farmers retained strong ties to traditional productive processes. Finally, the spread of cash crops meant land was increasingly likely to become a commodity, even though most Papua New Guineans had no clear idea of what that commodification could mean to their traditional sociocultural systems.

CHANGE IN BOUGAINVILLE TO 1964

The history of social change in Bougainville⁶ (see also Oliver 1991; Laracy 1976; Griffin, Nelson, and Firth 1979, 34–69; and ethnographic monographs cited below) is unique, not necessarily for the reasons Griffin (1990) suggests, but because it includes in some form almost all the kinds of disruptions discussed earlier.

Precontact Bougainville

Insofar as traditional relations of production can be reconstructed, they included the predictable gender-based division of labor; descent (matrilineality dominant for most of the nineteen language groups on Bougainville and Buka) as an important principle governing access to land, but with effects crosscut by locality and ego-centered kin networks; and exchange for both ceremonial purposes and the transfer of mundane products across ecological boundaries. Greater social stratification existed among speakers of Austronesian languages in the north, as well as among speakers of non-Austronesian Terei in Buin to the south, than in other parts of Bougainville. However, even those scholars who refer to such differences in status and power as constituting “classes” admit that individuals of higher status did not enjoy significant economic advantages in the production process.

Two features distinguished traditional Bougainville from certain other parts of Papua New Guinea, especially the highlands. First, gender relations tended toward complementarity rather than hierarchy (cf, Nash 1981). Widespread matrilineal descent did not produce true matriarchy in Bougainville any more than in any other place, but the status enjoyed by many Bougainville women contrasted sharply with reported highland practice. Nor did it disappear with an early male monopoly of metal tools,⁷ which may relate to another contrast: there seems to have been little, if any, population pressure on garden land at the time of European

contact and for decades thereafter. Thus, violence was neither as endemic as in other regions of Papua New Guinea, nor directed at land acquisition. Rather, it was associated with head-hunting practices in the south and cannibalism in the north.

Pre-World War II Change

During the first half of the nineteenth century, coastal dwellers exchanged coconuts and other provisions for such trade goods as metal tools and cloth. Trade in smoke-dried copra followed, and in the latter years of the century, men were recruited, especially from Buka, for plantation labor in Queensland, Fiji, Samoa, and New Britain. Early planters in the New Guinea islands, like "Queen" Emma Farrell and her associates, purchased land along the east coast, where there were natural harbors. Of course, the buyer's view of these transactions could not be shared by villagers whose land tenure systems did not make provision for permanent alienation.

The colonial history of Bougainville has been well described in other publications (see eg, Oliver 1991, 30–68). For our purposes, it is more important to note that "classic colonialism," based on copra plantations, began after imperial Germany established a permanent administrative post at the natural port of Kieta in 1905. The colonial impact was no more evenly distributed in Bougainville than elsewhere. Those living near good harbors, on Buka and the east coast of Bougainville proper, had most contact with planters, missionaries, and administrative officers. Villagers in the mountainous interior and the western reaches were indirectly affected, especially when they worked as indentured laborers on the relatively profitable coastal copra plantations.

Transfer of Bougainville to Australian administration after World War I had no real effect on relations of production, where copra plantations, small-scale village copra trading, and subsistence gardening were juxtaposed. On the eve of World War II, villagers were more likely to have contact with missionaries (Catholics arrived in Kieta in 1901, followed by Methodists and Seventh-Day Adventists after World War I) than with other Europeans.⁸ The Australian administration was further overshadowed by planters on Buka and around Kieta. Racist or paternalist attitudes toward the local population, though particularly characteristic of planters, appear to have been very widespread among resident Europeans.⁹

Postwar Developments

Probably no part of Papua New Guinea suffered more than Bougainville during World War II. The precipitate departure (cf, Griffin 1990, 6) of most of the self-styled European "masters" created bitter memories, still vivid in the minds of many villagers long after the war. The early stages of Japanese occupation were not notably disruptive, except for conflicts between those who eagerly collaborated with the new rulers and those who assisted Australian "coastwatchers." The fact that the Japanese were most strongly supported on Buka and in Kieta, areas of greatest plantation development (ibid), casts a harsh light on "classic colonialism." However, most villagers simply tried to continue normal subsistence activities.

This effort became impossible when the Allies counterattacked, as their bombing of Japanese facilities probably killed as many villagers as did any other aspect of the war. Villagers were forced to abandon gardens and villages, or to fight off the depredations of Japanese troops, starving as their supply lines disappeared. The Allied landing of 1943 and subsequent military action increased villager misery. What seemed most memorable about these events to villagers, recollecting them in the 1960s, were the sharp contrasts, first between their treatment by American military personnel and their prewar Australian "masters," and second, between the promises they claimed were made by the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit and the realities of their postwar lives.

Negative attitudes toward the colonial situation became obvious as Australian administrators and planters began the work of reconstruction. Throughout the district, but most notably on Buka and in south Bougainville, so-called cargo cults—which had occurred sporadically even before the war—began to appear in greater profusion. These varied in detail, but can be briefly described as a mixture of traditional and Christian religions, designed to produce economic and political well-being of a kind Europeans seemed to enjoy. Particularly frustrating to administrators was the way in which "cargo" beliefs affected "development" efforts. Sometimes villagers would simply reject government-sponsored projects in favor of "cargo" rituals. On other occasions, what seemed to agricultural extension officers to have begun as laudable cash-cropping projects turned into cultlike movements when villagers became impatient with slow progress.

More immediately painful to planters was their inability to recruit local labor. Some were adding cocoa, often interplanting among existing coco-

nut trees. This offered opportunities for casual labor to less disaffected Bougainvilleans from more remote parts of the district, but labor supplies were inadequate. Before the war as much as 90 percent of indentured laborers on Bougainville had been born in the district, but by 1951 planters had been forced to recruit an estimated eight to nine hundred workers from elsewhere in New Guinea (Nash and Ogan 1990, 15). Unlike the case of coffee in the highlands, cocoa did not bring with it new attitudes on the part of planters. As late as 1964, a senior administration official could say that he found "race relations" as bad in Kieta as anywhere he had been in Papua New Guinea.¹⁰

Bougainville's position as the district most distant from administrative headquarters in Port Moresby made its "development" in the postwar era problematic. Not only did "out of sight, out of mind" sometimes seem the operative principle in the assignment of government resources, but the undeniable facts of small population, expatriate success, and mission-provided health and education facilities might also have created what district officers, planters, and villagers all regarded (but with very different meanings attached) as "neglect." Nevertheless, efforts—sometimes extraordinary efforts by dedicated extension officers (see eg, Connell 1978)—to bring Bougainvilleans into the mainstream of cash cropping characterized the period from 1950 to 1964.

At different times and places, these efforts focused on coconuts, rice, cocoa, and coffee. (See Connell 1978 and Mitchell 1976 for detailed studies of cash cropping in south Bougainville.) Rice and coffee failed to have a lasting impact, primarily because of marketing difficulties and a lack of consistent extension assistance in some areas. Coconuts, of course, were a traditional subsistence crop and had been a source of money in the form of trade copra from early colonial days. Expansion of coconut stands meant some conflict with traditional land tenure systems, since the trees were planted by men who thus owned them individually. However, secondary rights to the land on which the trees were planted might also be claimed by the planter's matrilineal kin. Occasionally, a man planted a stand of trees on his wife's garden land, to which *her* matrilineal kin claimed primary rights. During the 1960s, patrol officers sometimes urged planters to register trees in their individual names and to specify heirs to the trees. Among Nasioi in the Kieta area, for example, this typically meant changing relations of production by establishing patrilineality, rather than matrilineality, as the basic descent principle governing inherited productive forces.

Establishment of cocoa as a cash crop meant additional changes to relations of production. Villager cocoa was most often planted on what had been garden land, rather than interplanted with coconuts. More important, cocoa is most profitable after processing that involves some heavy machinery. Therefore, extension officers were even more concerned to organize production and marketing cooperatives for cocoa; the difficulties of such organization are well described in the works cited by Connell and Mitchell.

All of this extension effort, directed by male officers toward males, represented a further attack on the relative autonomy and complementary (rather than subordinate) status traditionally enjoyed by women in most Bougainville communities.¹¹ The same practices in the highlands, where women had been disadvantaged before colonialism, deepened subordination. As Nash (1974) has definitively pointed out for the Nagovisi, matrilineal institutions proved surprisingly resistant to such changes, and individual women who earned substantial cash income from cocoa had emerged in other areas by the 1970s. Nevertheless, gender-based relations of production were certainly affected by postwar "development" in Bougainville as they had not been by earlier "classic colonialism." None of this "development" up to 1964, however, had the impact of what was about to arrive on the island.

MINING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF PRODUCTIVE RELATIONS

Bougainville had not been exempt from the "gold fever" that sent expatriate prospectors to different parts of Papua New Guinea before World War II. A small gold mine had been operating in the Kieta subdistrict from 1933 until the war, but the returns had never justified miners' optimism. In 1960, however, the same area was discovered to have a large deposit of low-grade copper, which could be profitably mined by technologies developed since the war. A joint venture was formed in 1964 by two Australian subsidiaries of the London-based transnational mining giant Rio Tinto-Zinc to test further the feasibility of a major mine.

Landowners, Compensation, and Change

There is no need to recapitulate here the negotiation of the 1967 mining agreement and those aspects of the project that developed outside Bougainville. Our concern is rather with the transformations that took

place within the island. One point must be repeated, however: those speakers of the Nasioi language who claimed primary rights to the land involved in the mine were grossly disadvantaged from the beginning, and no subsequent renegotiation has been able to remedy the situation. This is clearly a consequence of the incongruity between traditional relations of production as they affect rights to land and the demands of modern industrial capitalism (cf, Filer 1990; Hyndman 1987, 1991).

Initially, it appeared that only those directly affected by construction of the mine and associated facilities (others, of course, could claim subsidiary land rights under the traditional system; cf, Ogan 1971) were to receive any payment at all. This was to be in the form of compensation for the loss of land, gardens, and so on, assessed at a minimal level. Only a remarkable effort by Bougainville Member of the House of Assembly (later Sir) Paul Lapun obtained for the landowners a royalty amounting to 5 percent of the government's royalty, that is, 0.625 percent of the value of minerals produced.

The renegotiation in 1974 of the original agreement between the mining company and the Papua New Guinea government was followed in 1975 by the transfer of the central government's 1.25 percent royalty to the newly formed North Solomons Provincial Government. Although the basic 0.625 percent royalty for Nasioi landowners remained unaltered, many changes had taken place in the rates and manner of payment of compensation for environmental damage, relocation of villages, and the like. Bedford and Mamak (1979), Connell (1989), Carruthers (1990), and Okole (1990) provide detail which need not be reproduced here. What does need to be underlined is that the formulae for distributing such payments could not possibly take into account the traditional hierarchy of land rights that served a different mode of production. Thus, villagers who had subsidiary claims under traditional tenure systems received much less than those who were regarded, however correctly, as primary right holders.¹²

Class Formation

From 1968 to 1972, a tremendous technological effort went into construction of the mine, port facilities, new towns with hospitals, and other amenities. To carry out this task, international construction firms came to what had been, four years earlier, a sleepy little island. At a time when the total population of Bougainville was less than eighty thousand, some ten

thousand construction workers flooded into the Kieta area and inland to the mine site. Mostly unattached males, they changed what had been a quiet colonial port into something resembling a brawling frontier town (Momis and Ogan 1971).

Along with social disruption came other changes. Although most local men deeply resented the mine and were at first unwilling to work for the mining company itself, they were more inclined to seek jobs with the construction firms. Here they found themselves working for the first time side by side with expatriates, whom they saw doing heavy manual labor. As they learned new skills, they began performing the same tasks as these newcomers, and the construction firms were happy to replace highly paid foreign workers with lower paid locals whenever possible.

The mining company had its reasons for treating Bougainvilleans differently from the way plantation managers had for so long. Mining executives were always aware of their responsibility to maximize profits for their shareholders. It was in the best interests of that profitability to employ as many locals as possible at lower wages than those commanded by expatriates, and to maintain friendly relations with others in the area. As the company chairman observed in 1972: "I am best able, in the long run, to ensure the return on my shareholders' investment by conducting our business in a way which satisfies local requirements" (Espie 1973, 335).

In order to win goodwill, mining executives—whatever their personal attitudes—initially had to fight any appearance of the kind of racism that had characterized the earlier colonial situation. Facilities such as mess halls discriminated only by level of job skills, not race. The company initiated training programs and established university and technical school scholarships to produce a work force less expensive in the long run than the expatriates first employed. These efforts yielded results, and by 1980 about 80 percent of the work force was Papua New Guinean. Some 30 percent of employees were Bougainvilleans (BCL annual reports). Furthermore, these workers were developing a much stronger commitment to wage employment and an urban lifestyle than any of their predecessors in the eras of "classic colonialism" or "development."

A "large proportion" of the urban workers surveyed by Bedford and Mamak (1976) in Bougainville in 1973–74 still regarded wage employment as a temporary alternative to rural economic activity, especially cash cropping. However, a second group of their respondents displayed a "much stronger commitment to wage earning," and more recent evidence suggests

that this "proletarian" group expanded significantly in subsequent years. An increasingly stable national work force at Bougainville Copper Limited is one indication of this trend. Some 34 percent of the company's national work force terminated their employment during 1973. By 1977 this turnover rate had dropped to 15 percent, and by the mid-1980s it had stabilized at about 10 percent per year. Indeed, at the end of 1984 about 16 percent of national employees had been with the company since production began, and about 50 percent had been there for at least seven years (information supplied by Bougainville Copper Limited). In a 1984 survey of urban workers in Bougainville, a small majority still indicated a preferred future occupation for themselves that was rural in nature. But a large majority thought urban residence would be better for their children (Wesley-Smith 1988, 261-275).

Nevertheless, the process of proletarianization initiated by large-scale mining on Bougainville was far from complete in the mid-1980s. Although some of those surveyed in 1984 appeared to have lost touch with their rural relatives, most continued to maintain strong links with their home areas through regular visits and remittances. Bougainville Copper Limited's efforts to localize its work force had limits, however. The overall rate of localization slowed after about 1980 and, while nationals continued to displace expatriates from skilled and semiskilled positions, the upper echelons of the company remained largely the preserve of expatriates. In 1984 only thirty-three Papua New Guineans occupied professional positions in the company, with a further thirty-five in assistant or subprofessional jobs (Spencer 1984).¹³

Mining's role in the emergence of an indigenous bourgeoisie was even more dramatic. Since Bougainville Copper Limited did not purchase its supplies from other members of its transnational corporate family, or from some centralized purchasing agency, it had no reason to favor overseas suppliers. Indeed, with the positive incentive of fostering goodwill, the company actively encouraged the development of local businesses through its Business Advisory Service, as well as through the Panguna Development Foundation. Of the many local ventures spawned by the mine, by far the most important was the Bougainville Development Corporation, a quasi-state enterprise established with the help of mining company advisors in 1975.

The corporation concentrated initially on penetrating the industries serving the mining project. By the early 1980s it was a multimillion kina

operation involved in a wide variety of peripheral activities, and a significant employer of skilled and unskilled labor.¹⁴ Furthermore, its Bougainvillean principals were determined to move out of the shadow of foreign mining capital and into self-sustaining economic activities. By the mid-1980s, the Bougainville Development Corporation was established in plantation agriculture and was actively seeking involvement in hydro-power generation and further mining in the province.¹⁵ For the first time, a group of Bougainvilleans had emerged whose interests lay in the transformation of traditional relations of production, and specifically in the commodification of land and labor.

Class and Crisis

The changes induced by mining after 1964 further disrupted social relations between the sexes, and between generations on Bougainville. Although an ideology of matriliney remained strong in most of Bougainville, key positions in the mine, cooperative societies, and private businesses were invariably occupied by men. For younger men, further divisions developed: first, between them and their elders who had either established themselves in profitable relations with the mine (cf, Filer 1990, 104–105) or in cash cropping (cf, Ogan 1986, 31–32); and second, between the minority of young men who had benefited from formal education and the majority who had not.¹⁶ In general, the combination of widely varying compensation payments, royalties, wage employment connected with the mine and related enterprises, and differential success in cash cropping¹⁷ produced extraordinary variation in income in an area that had previously been characterized by a relative egalitarianism.

As Okole (1990) makes abundantly clear, the problems of an emergent social class stratification do not simply constitute what Griffin (1990, 13) calls a “*passé* Marxist fantasy.” They are better understood as “the product of an historical dialectic between the logic of capitalist production and [traditional] cultural concepts and forms of social organization” (LiPuma and Meltzoff 1989, 329). Viewed as “living, emergent, and constantly transforming as opposed to rock-stable, and predetermined categories” (ibid), these new relations are directly relevant to the current crisis.

There is no doubt, for example, that class relations contributed significantly to the political tensions over mining apparent in Bougainville during the 1980s (Wesley-Smith 1992). As provincial premier from 1980 to 1984, Chairman of the Bougainville Development Corporation Leo Han-

nett was committed to using mining as a catalyst to transform Bougainville's economy. In so doing he was effectively representing the interests of an emergent indigenous bourgeoisie with an increasing appetite for land and labor.

Hannett's approach engendered considerable resentment among Bougainvilleans intent on conserving the essential integrity of traditional modes of production. The most prominent members of this group were smallholders relying heavily on traditional relations of production to produce cash crops in conjunction with subsistence. This ground swell of resistance was effectively exploited for political purposes by leaders of the Melanesian Alliance party like Father John Momis, who regularly criticized the mining company and vigorously opposed the initiatives of the Bougainville Development Corporation. As an alternative to Hannett's "capitalist road" to development, the Melanesian Alliance advocated small-scale, village-based projects, and emphasized "Melanesian ways."

Much has been made of the effect of Melanesian Alliance strategies on the expectations of landowners in the vicinity of the mine. Indeed, Quodling (1991, 52) argues that Father Momis' 1987 "Bougainville initiative," which promised landowners a greater share of mining wealth, was "one of the prime catalysts, if not the major one" of the present crisis. However, it is by no means clear that the issue of compensation was the most important one for Francis Ona and the other landowners who embarked on a campaign of sabotage in late 1988. It seems more likely that their intention from an early date was to permanently close down the mine (Filer 1990, 96). The significance of the "Bougainville initiative" was that, by envisaging any sort of future for mining in the province, it failed to reflect the aspirations of at least some erstwhile Melanesian Alliance supporters.

It is also clear that the rebels themselves see their struggle at least partly in class terms. As Filer (1990, 83n12) notes, their early statements are replete with references not only to the "white mafia" of Bougainville Copper Limited and the Department of Minerals and Energy, but to comprador "black men in top offices." Indeed, a recent planning document states that the new government of the Republic of Bougainville "*mas noken kamapim ol sosol class o helpim long kamapim ol sosol classes hia long Ripablik*" (Sinko, nd, 1).¹⁸

Although much of the antagonism of rebel leaders is directed at the perceived misdeeds of bourgeois elements, the rebel movement emerged in the context of conflict within the landowning community itself. Indeed,

landowners clearly do not constitute a class in any meaningful sense of the term. Rather, before the crisis began, some landowners were peasants producing commodities for the market, some were wage workers, and others were aspiring members of the bourgeoisie. This complexity simply reflects the fact that most Bougainvilleans retain their ties to traditional modes of production. It should not deter further investigation of the class dimension of the Bougainville crisis.

CONCLUSION

In sketching this broad historical background, we have focused on changing relations of production in order to provide a basis for comparison between past and present, and between Bougainville and the rest of Papua New Guinea. This approach may help to clarify certain aspects of the present crisis.

First, the history of social change in Bougainville provides the most extreme example of a general truth about Papua New Guinea: even where introduced capitalist relations of production have had the greatest effect, they have not completely eliminated those that existed before colonialism. This is most painfully obvious in problems over land rights, in systems that—as Crocombe and Hide (1971; see also Ogan 1971) pointed out twenty years ago—provide myriad ways to establish claims but absolutely no way to extinguish them to the agreement of all interested parties. Such a system is clearly vital in the minds of Nasioi, permitting continued claims on land that capitalist practice deems bought and paid for.

Another aspect of traditional productive relations in Bougainville that has not yet been eliminated by social change concerns the role of women. Although all institutions introduced by colonial and neocolonial forces have tended to increase, rather than decrease, inequalities between the sexes, women have continued to fight back, as exemplified by the part played by the late Perpetua Serero in the new Panguna Landowners' Association (Okole 1990, 20). It seems at least possible that other women will come forward to take an active role in the future.

Third, and more problematic, is the emergence of true social classes. The development of social classes is further complicated by issues of ethnicity (Nash and Ogan 1990, 13) and intergenerational conflict: to what extent might class lines coincide, or conflict, with divisions of ethnicity (within and beyond Bougainville) and age? Such questions cry

out for detailed study on which to base plans for appropriate social policy.¹⁹

In this context, it is rather surprising (at least to us, who have regarded the effects of the copper mine on the people of Bougainville as deplorable) to find an executive of Bougainville Copper Limited raising precisely the questions that should have been asked much earlier, by an Australian administration, by the government of independent Papua New Guinea, and by all those trying to stem the violence on Bougainville and prevent comparable incidents occurring elsewhere in the Pacific (cf, Hyndman 1991). Carruthers (1990, 43) asks:

Is it possible to get unanimous landholder agreement to a project?

Is it practical to proceed, and to maintain operations without unanimous agreement?

Can landholders be held to an agreement which involves the permanent or long-term alienation or destruction of land?

Can one imagine a situation other than constantly escalating demands for compensation?

Can the envy generated by unequal distribution of income be contained?

Although in this article we have not provided specific answers to these questions, we have tried to demonstrate that such answers are best sought in a careful consideration of modes of production, and especially the relations of production that are entailed in past, present, and future economic systems in Bougainville and elsewhere. The possibility that large-scale mining in Papua New Guinea will continue even if the answers to all of Carruthers' questions are negative should be a matter of great concern to all who have been appalled by the tragedy on Bougainville.

Notes

1 David Hyndman (1991; see also Hyndman 1987) appears to be the one scholar writing about Bougainville who has explicitly employed the concept of mode of production in his analysis, but he did so only briefly, to draw a contrast between "kinship modes of production" and the mining industry.

2 What follows is a much truncated and simplified version of an argument developed in greater detail, with appropriate qualifications and cautions, in Ogan and Wesley-Smith (1992).

3 This assumption is, of course, widely shared by others with quite different ideological orientations.

4 This does not mean Papua New Guinea societies were egalitarian, in the sense that there were no distinctions of *status* or *power*. Obviously, in some societies there were notably different status and power relationships based on gender, achievement in warfare or exchange, or, in a limited number of cases, inheritance.

5 Connell (1979, 123) estimates that only about 2 percent of all land in Papua New Guinea was alienated during the colonial era, but for land with agricultural potential the figure was more like 10 percent.

6 Unless otherwise specified, "Bougainville" as used here includes Buka Island as well, the two islands composing the largest part of what has been called at different times the Kieta District, the Bougainville District, and the North Solomons Province.

7 For example, certain Tinputz women as well as men continued to enjoy the status, inherited matrilineally, of *tsunaun*, sometimes glossed "person of importance" (Ruth Saovana-Spriggs, pers comm, 1989).

8 The missions provided whatever formal education villagers received, and much of the medical assistance available. Griffin (1990, 6) calls them "virtually the *de facto* government."

9 Robert Stuart, a planter on Bougainville from 1925 to 1968, provides a wonderfully unselfconscious portrait of such attitudes and behavior (Stuart 1977), which, as will be noted, continued into the 1960s.

10 As an unwilling and powerless firsthand observer of European racism in the Kieta area from 1962 to 1964, Ogan is struck by the way other writers about Bougainville seem to ignore the significance of such past behavior for understanding present-day Bougainvillean attitudes. For example, the history of race relations in Bougainville prior to the arrival of the mining company contrasts notably with the expressed Australian philosophy of "partnership" in the highlands after World War II.

11 Women's status had also inevitably suffered to a degree from the attitudes and practices of planters interested only in male labor, administrators most comfortable dealing with other men, and patriarchal (if not downright misogynist) missionaries.

12 For example, occupation fees paid to individuals in the tailings area ranged in 1988 from K2 to K27,960 (Connell 1989, 19; K1 equals approximately US\$1).

13 Company officials argued that nationals tended to perform poorly in overseas postgraduate programs, and failed to display the professional competence necessary to occupy senior positions (Spencer 1984, 8).

14 The company's interests included laundry, engineering, printing, catering, and canteen services; liquor, hardware, and timber retailing; vehicle repairs;

polyurethane manufacturing; property rentals; and airline operations. Its most significant service venture was a limestone mining operation at Manetai that was largely financed by an overseas loan of US\$6.5 million (BDC, annual reports).

15 The company acquired the Sabah Plantation in a joint venture with Anglo Proprietary Limited in 1983, and built the Cocoa Inspection Depot at Buin in the same year. In 1984, it entered into a joint venture arrangement with S. and W. Berisford, a British company, to purchase two significant properties, Numa Numa and Bonis plantations.

16 As Ogan (1986, 26–28) has noted for Nasioi, a rapid increase in population has created special social problems for the young, clearly reflected in the role of *raskols* in the current crisis (see, especially, Spriggs 1990).

17 Smallholder production of cocoa in Bougainville expanded rapidly during the 1970s and 1980s. Besides individually owned stands of coconut and cocoa trees, groups of Bougainvilleans had begun in the 1970s to take over some plantations from expatriate owners. The major single investment of the Road Mine Leases Trust Fund, using compensation payments to Nasioi landowners, was in two such plantations (Okole 1990, 17).

18 Government “must not create any class differences or help create any social classes in the Republic.”

19 It is interesting, if depressing, to note that fifteen years ago an official in the then Office of Minerals and Energy suggested “the social impact of major mining projects,” and “the growth of new socioeconomic classes as a result of mining development” were among the areas that needed further study (Zorn 1976, 60). Obviously, no one in authority was listening.

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